

Letters to the Editor *Lettres à la rédaction*

Tail docking and ear cropping – A comment

To The Readers of *The CVJ*,

I graduated from the Atlantic Veterinary College of The University of Prince Edward Island in the class of 1990. I distinctly remember the attitude of our class and that of the veterinary community in general towards the unnecessary cosmetic mutilations of certain breeds promoted by organizations like the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC). The average age of students in our class was about 36-years-old. We had a substantial number of members in our class who were mature, strong personality types who had well-established beliefs and the conviction to see them through. Our class lobbied the CKC over this issue. I remember the promise elicited from the CKC by our class at the time. They promised us that they would phase out acceptance of mutilatory cosmetic surgeries in these breeds (specifically ear cropping) over the ensuing 5 years. The gist of the promise was that after a 5-year grace period they would begin to apply penalties to dogs shown in the ring that had cropped ears. It is 20 years later, and as you can all see that promise was the usual political hot air.

I am saddened to continue to see the discomfort these animals go through and the pain that the puppies suffer when their tails are docked and their dewclaws are removed shortly after birth. The people who promote these practices come up with numerous arguments about how these procedures are performed in other species (production animals) and how they want their “breed standards” upheld. None of these arguments can tolerate the light of logic or dispassionate discussion. Any animal-loving person with an ounce of common sense can see that these arguments are nonsense.

These procedures are nothing more or less than vanity on the part of the breeders and/or owners of these dogs. They perform no useful preventive health function in these breeds whatsoever. They do, however, cause significant pain and discomfort, and very likely psychological damage in these animals. These creatures trust us to care for them, protect them, and share our lives with them. Mutilating them for the sake of our own vanity seems an incredibly poor way to reward this trust.

As Dr. Terry Whiting pointed out in the December 2009 issue (*Can Vet J* 2009;50:1217–1218), conscientious veterinarians all over North America refuse to perform these procedures on animals and many European countries have banned these procedures altogether! I agree, it is time that we, as an organization, step up and properly protect these animals. Remember “Primum Non Nocum” folks?

I would also love to see the Canadian Kennel Club honor the promise they made to my class 20 years ago; however, I doubt if the “political will” exists to see it done. Regrettably, the only organizations that can pressure breeders into stopping these practices are the Canadian and American Kennel Clubs. Don’t hold your breath though folks, you will certainly suffocate before either of these organizations summon the “intestinal fortitude” to eliminate these mutilations from the show ring.

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Dear Sir,

I applaud the President’s Message (*Can Vet J* 2009;50:1123–1124) stating that tail docking and ear cropping for cosmetic reasons has to end. As a body of veterinarians, if we agree that causing pain in our patients for cosmetic reasons is not acceptable, then doing so should be unprofessional. Arguing that if we don’t do it other individuals will be sanctioning doing it and not showing the leadership in animal welfare that we should.

We must stop using the excuse that it is better if veterinarians do it and simply all stop doing it. Nations where many of these

breeds and standards were developed have banned tail docking and ear cropping and it is time for all of Canada to embrace this animal welfare concept.

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